

Western MRS Meeting Notes  
April 24, 2007  
AB Tech Enka Campus

Counties Present: Catawba, Cleveland, Henderson, Jackson, McDowell, Polk, Swain, Watauga.

Introductions

News from Raleigh

Data Collection

CSFR

Foster Homes – revisited

Training – Making it Stick

Barriers and Victories

WF/CPS Collaboration

Data Collection - Update on MRS database/DataWarehouse from Heather

- The changes to the web system are starting to be implemented.
  - As of yesterday some fields have been removed. These are:
    - 210-12 Assignment of Accepted Reports (we can figure this out based on the finding.)
    - 210-20 If Petition filed with Juvenile Court, the date of that petition.
    - 210-22 Previous CPS contact with agency
    - 210 and 215 – 25 Criminal Disposition
  - The risk re-assessment risk levels are now also correct. Previously they were incorrect so that if you were entering them correctly you might have gotten an error message and could not save the information.
- In the next month DIRM will be making more changes to the MRS database. This may result in the MRS database being unavailable for a period of time. If you have workers trying to access it to key and it is unavailable, wait a couple of hours and try back before calling Heather or the Help Desk.
- Since they are uploading the changes a couple of pieces at a time the best way for me to keep you informed will be the MRS email.
- Once all the changes are made the 5106 will be updated one time and a DCD letter will come out.
- Currently constructing queries for the DataWarehouse. Reviewed the ones we are working on and solicited ideas for others.
- Thinking about training in late May or June.

CFSR

- We were the 2<sup>nd</sup> state to go though the CFSR – we failed which they had told us up front that we would (they said everyone would fail.)
- The feds felt that MRS was a significant strength.
- The lead reviewer was so impressed with MRS she has asked us to send in a paper talking about MRS for publication on the Children's Bureau website as best practice.
- Community folks reported that MRS had completely changed the Child Welfare System.

- Have already started working on implementing changes in areas where we could use some improvement. Nothing really dramatic that will come as a complete surprise.
- One area needing some improvement was non-custodial (absent) parents. Not just locating them (although we should work harder at that) but increased contact and attempts at engagement. Want them included in case plans.

### Foster Homes – revisited

In February we talked about assessments on children in Foster Homes. All reports on children in Foster Care must be taken as investigative assessments. We discussed the pros and cons of offering the option to take these as family assessments if they met criteria. (For a review of these discussions see notes from the three February meetings.)

- Most people here could see both sides or if they were not here last meeting, wanted time to process the comments.
- One comment that we should approach these situations in the same way we do with other CPS cases, take them on an individual basis.
  - In Foster Care cases, have the additional piece around licensing. If they get a report this county brings in their licensure person. Decide if the report is a licensure issue or a neglect/abuse issue. (Example: If a foster parent spanks a child (not serious spanking) – not a CPS abuse/neglect issue, but it is a licensing issue.
  - You can't sub on a licensing issue if the child was not at risk or unsafe just because a licensing issue was violated.
- It is possible that many of the 'higher standards' that people were concerned about are really licensing issues, not CPS issues. There IS a higher standard but that is with the licensing.
- One suggestion made last month at the Central Meeting was that you would start them as Investigative but once you did the initial Safety Assessment if it still could meet the standards for Family Assessment you would be able to change.
  - No one here really for that, some spoke out and disagreed. Felt the most powerful aspect of a family assessment is that initial interaction and you would miss that if you started them as investigative.
  - Don't think it would mean that much if you shifted down.
- Former licensing worker felt that there should be a partnership with CPS and licensing in these cases. The licensing worker is a support for the Foster Families.
- Feel that some people may overreact to the report because it is on licensed Foster Parents. So concerned with appearances and being sure kids are not being abused and neglected while in Foster Care, that we may 'freak out' unnecessarily and we can do harm being doing investigations that were unnecessary even if we unsubstantiate

### Training – Making it Stick

How do we follow up with training? Send people to training and months later they aren't 'doing' family centered – how do you sustain and reinforce the training? You can't just go to a training and then never talk about it again. Any ideas about this?

- One worker went to a Conference last week and she now has to write up what she learned and present it to the supervisors and other workers.

- Holly used to have a team bulletin board and changed it quarterly – it had to pertain to the 6 principles of partnership.
- Some counties have their own trainers. If you do not, supervisors can do this. There is training available from the state for supervisors to learn how to do this.

### Barriers & Victories

We are almost a year and a half into statewide implementation - what has gone well – or what might have surprised you in the way that it worked out?

- Worker that came from an in-home services background is glad to see the quality of services that DSS provides now and the real difference in the atmosphere at DSS and the relationship with families.
- Others agreed that families have a more positive view of DSS. They hear from other families and then are more willing to let DSS in the door and work with them now that they have seen or heard from their neighbors that we are working with them - not telling them what to do.
- Now our actions mesh more with our principles. Before we could say that we wanted to work with families and we respected them, but we didn't respect them enough to let them know before we talked to their children at school.
- Holly bragged on Cleveland that they offered School Partners an opportunity to attend a family centered practice training to build the relationship.
- Pleased to see what ideas the family can come up with for their case plans. Since the families have set their plan, they tend to work harder to achieve it and if it does go to court, there is less animosity because she has found that although the family is not happy to be in court, they realized that they did not live up to their own plan so they can't blame DSS for it.
- One county now has DSS SW in the schools which has helped (these are not the grant ones, they are "regular" DSS workers.)

What are barriers still?

- With MRS not only are we (DSS) changing, but we are asking community partners to change with us. This can be a challenge because we cannot force people to change with us, we have to work with people to help them change and understand what rules they have that cannot change.
- Schools are still big issue many places. They want DSS to be the 'bad guy'.
- The 'downside' to the quality of services is more time up front. Although this leads to fewer 'repeats' and less time at the end, hard to manage the increased time up front.
- Duke can now make a direct correlation between more minutes during assessments and less time in case management.
- Issues with CFTs being held quarterly – although realize that these are useful it is hard to get them scheduled because of the work involved.

### WF/CPS Collaboration

What has been going well? Either something new or something that a county has been doing for some time?

- Always try to have a WF worker at the Child and Family Team meetings. They need to know what is going on anyway, and this involves them in the case plan and often the WF worker can hold the family more accountable than some of the CPS workers.

- Have a WF person at staffings. The perspective is just enough different to shed new light on the case and help DSS understand the family and the case better. CPS only sees one side of families and WF sees a different side of them.
- Cleveland worker does ensure that her case plan coordinates with WF because in her agency in the past there had been times that the CPS case plan issues were with supervision but the WF plan was making mom go look for a job at certain times and she had no one to watch the kids so that was creating the CPS issues and there was no way mom could do both.

What would you like to see?

- Working with WF to see about helping family members get custody of children that are placed there.
- Having some DV funds go through WF and also work with the 200% of poverty funds allow services to families that do not necessarily involve getting a check.
- Some folks did not know there were a work first plan – there is a plan that must be done every two years to determine how the WF money will be spent. This is a significant endeavor and involves the community members, etc. Should involve CPS if it doesn't – at least to know what it says even if can't be on the team that develops it.
- Electing county – means that they have a little more leeway with how they make their plan (can be more varied than the state plan but still has to be approved by the state.)
- Many child only cases are created because CPS removed the child and now the child lives with a relative. Work First may feel dumped on when this happens. There are issues with placements like this – may not be safety issues, but the relative needs assistance not just a check. Making some home visits to this home to ensure stability and deal with issues when they start rather than when they have blown up and the placement is threatened. If WF is making occasional home visits they can alert CPS to these issues, or contact CPS for information on where to make community referrals if the issue is not to the level of CPS involvement.
- Success meetings – near the end of a WF timeclock. Similar to CFT meetings on the CPS side. Making sure the family is self-sufficient at the end of their clock may save you a CPS report in the future.
- Last March the theme of MRS meetings was collaboration between CPS and WF. All across the state there were roomfuls of WF workers and no CPS workers.
  - Trying to figure out why CPS doesn't seem to think they need to know about the WF side.
  - At the MRS institute they offer WF for CPS workers – only a few people attended, but at the CPS for WF workshop it was packed and that it was offered twice.
- There is some tension between CPS and WF. Sometimes there is some snobbery from CPS toward WF because CPS typically have a Masters and WF may not. Each job has different necessary skill sets. Neither area is better than the other and to make the best outcomes for families we must have both types of people/jobs. Need to take a close look at yourself and see if you are guilty of this, if you are not probably there is some of it in your agency culture.

- How do we counteract this? CPS always uses the excuse that we are busy (crisis oriented) to avoid meetings etc. Yes, we are busy but making these connections will actually help us do our jobs.
  - We need to see how WF can help CPS, but we also need to see how we can help them.
  - We need to help WF because unless families are secure that they have a home and can feed their children, they cannot begin to work seriously on neglect and safety issues.
- Do folks call WF when you get a new report – even if the family is not currently on WF – tell the WF worker about the family's situation and see if there is anything that they can offer. If we don't ask we don't know its there and WF doesn't know that we need it.

Future Meetings:

Western –

May – May 24<sup>th</sup> – Black Mountain Library